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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003758

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: MUTHANNA OFFICIALS' MEASURED OPINION OF TRIBAL  
SUPPORT COUNCILS

REF: A. BAGHDAD 3654  
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 2307  
[1](#)C. HILLAH 81

Classified By: Senior Advisor Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) Local government officials in Muthanna expressed their concerns about the legality of how the Maliki government established the tribal support councils (SCs) to Senior Advisor Gray during his November 24-25 visit, while tribal sheikhs stressed how important SCs are to assuring a voice for the sometimes marginalized tribes at the local and, eventually, national level. End summary.

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Concern Among the Politicians  
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[1](#)2. (C) Tribal support councils, also known as "majles isnad," have become a useful tool of Prime Minister Maliki in forwarding his political objectives, while providing more influence for loyal sheikhs (ref A). Provincial politicians in Muthanna, therefore, are concerned about the potential political power of these groups and question the legality and propriety of the Prime Minister's establishment of these SCs.

[1](#)3. (C) Gordon Gray, senior advisor for southern affairs, visited Muthanna and Dhi Qar provinces on November 24-25. He and PRT Muthanna staff discussed the SCs with local politicians and sheikhs involved with the program. Both Governor Ahmed Marzook and Provincial Council (PC) Chairman Abdul Hussein Al-Dhalimi support, in principle, the idea of sheikhs coming together to discuss issues of interest to them, but were concerned about the way in which the SCs were formed and funded by the Prime Minister. The PC chairman was particularly vocal on the issue. He warned that the provincial government should not work with the SC or else be seen as favoring some tribes over others. Governor Marzook and PC Chairman Dhalimi said the Muthanna government has submitted to the Prime Minister's Office its complaints about the "mechanism" used to create SCs, and are awaiting a response.

[1](#)4. (C) The governor and PC chairman, however, were mild in their criticism of the SCs and tempered their objections by highlighting the potential benefits of SCs. Governor Marzook, for example, noted that SCs could help bring neglected rural tribes into the political process. Thus, they both placed their complaint squarely on the formation process in Baghdad, not the SCs in Muthanna or any local sheikh.

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Newly Found Influence for the SC Sheikhs  
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[1](#)5. (C) Not surprisingly, sheikhs involved in SCs are pleased

with the enhanced power and influence that come with membership. Sheikhs have told PRT Muthanna staff in the recent past that their support for SCs is largely due to the accompanying patronage (ref B). Some sheikhs, though, have long-term plans for growing the power and influence of the SC network. Sheik Ali Manshed from Dhi Qar province told us that Muhammad Salman, the chairman of the Implementation and Follow-up Committee for National Reconciliation (IFCNR), is devising a way to create a National Tribal Council. One option is for SCs in each province to select five representatives to a new council in Baghdad that would work with other central government institutions.

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Comment  
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¶6. (C) Governor Marzook and PC Chairman Dhalimi are likely favorably disposed to the SC concept because of their have strong ties to local tribes -- the Albu Hassan tribe for Marzook and the Al-Dhuwalim tribes for Dhalimi -- and seek tribal support for the upcoming provincial elections. Dhalimi, like other provincial officials affiliated with the QDhalimi, like other provincial officials affiliated with the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (see, for example, ref C), is less keen on Maliki's direct involvement, indicating SCs, even in tribal-rich Muthanna, are colored by partisan politics.

¶7. (C) SC enthusiasm for the Maliki government almost certainly relies on access (or perceived access) to the patronage system from the Prime Minister's office. Such loyalty does not automatically translate to Maliki's Da'wa

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party in general, as many of these sheikhs have their own affiliated political parties that are not necessarily aligned with Da'wa. If patronage from Baghdad dries up, tribal support for the Maliki government likely will as well. End comment.  
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